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Queen's Own Rifles of Canada

HISTORY OF THE SECOND BATTALION

—THE—

"QUEEN'S OWN RIFLES."

OF TORONTO.

IN the year 1856 several Volunteer Rifle Companies were raised in Toronto, who, while regularly drilled, were separate, distinct and independent organizations, under the control only of the Inspecting Field Officer of the Province, until the beginning of 1860, when the late Col. Geo. T. Denison, a militia officer of long standing, and great zeal, then in command of the mounted force at Toronto, proposed to the Government the formation of a Battalion from the several city Companies. To this they at once assented and asked him to undertake the task. A meeting of the officers was immediately called, including those of the Barrie and Brampton Companies, as there were at the time only four efficient companies in the city, and six were necessary for a Battalion; and on submitting the project, the feeling was found to be so unanimous in its favor, that on the 26th April, 1860, the following companies were gazetted as the 2nd Battalion Volunteer Militia Rifles of Canada; Col. Denison being at the same time appointed Commandant of the District;

Rifle Co. Barrie, (Now No. 1, 35th Batt.) as No. 1; gazetted as a Co. 27th Dec., 1855. 1st Rifle Co., Toronto, as No. 2; gazetted as a Co. 20th March, 1856. 3rd Rifle Co., Toronto, as No. 3; gazetted as a Co. 20th March, 1856. Highland Co., Toronto, as No. 4; gazetted as a Co., 18th Sept., 1856. Foot Artillery Co., Toronto, as No. 5; gazetted as a Co. 13th Nov., 1856. Highland Co., Whitby, (Now No. 1 Co., 34th Batt.) as No. 6; gazetted as a Co. 31st March, 1858.

The Brampton Company though originally intended as part of this Battalion, was for some reason exchanged for the Whitby Company.

The Field Officers and Staff appointed were : Capt. and Brevet Lieut. Col. Wm. S. Durie, from No. 1 Co., Lieut. Col. ; Capt. Geo. Brooke, from No. 2 Co., Major ; Capt. A. M. Smith from No. 4 Co., Major ; Major R. B. Denison, unattached list, Paymaster ; Capt. Henry Goodwin, from No. 5 Co., Adjutant ; Capt. and Brevet Major Jno. Nickinson, from No. 3 Co., Quartermaster ; Surgeon Jas. Thorburn, from late 4th Rifle Co., Toronto, Surgeon ; Frank Bull, M. D., Asst. Surgeon.

Upon Lieut. Col. Durie devolved the arduous task of getting the Battalion into shape, and under whose popular command it thrived, and grew in strength and reputation. In November, 1865, he was appointed Assistant Adjt. Genl. of the 2nd Military District.

During the visit of the Prince of Wales, in September, 1860, the first four companies were reviewed by His Royal Highness, in the Queen's Park, Toronto, being the only occasion on which either of the outside companies, Barrie or Whitby were present at head-quarters.

In the latter part of 1861, and beginning of 1862, several independent companies were organized in the city, some of which were immediately added to the strength of the Battalion, viz : Capt. Latham's Company, as No. 7 ; Capt. Murray's " 2nd Merchants," as No. 8 Company, and Trinity College Company, No. 9, while others did not join until the 21st. Nov., 1862, when by a general order, the corps was made up to a strength of ten companies, exclusive of the Barrie and Whitby companies, which again became independent, and Capt. Latham's Company, which was transferred to the 10th Battalion. Almost immediately after this reorganization, permission was applied for to adopt the title of the "Queen's Own Rifles of Toronto," which was graciously granted by Her Majesty, in March, 1863, and on the 24th May of the same year, the lady friends and relatives of the Regiment presented it with a handsome silver Mace, which though not strictly a part of the equipment of a rifle regiment, was used for many years While still highly treasured as a souvenir of old times, it is now never seen on parade.

Consequent upon the excitement caused by the St. Alban's raid in 1864, two companies of the corps, under Captains Chas. T. Gillmor and Jno. Brown, Lieuts. W. D. Otter and W. D. Jarvis, Ensigns Jas. Bennett and Wm. Corbould and Lieut. F. E. Dixon, Adjutant, were detailed, in December, for duty at Niagara, as a part of the 2nd Administrative Battalion, under Lieut.-Col. Durie, and on their return in 1865, after four months service, a third company was sent to Sarnia, in November, under Captain W. D. Jarvis, Lieutenant F. Morison and Ensign W. Carfrae Campbell, for upwards of six months. In June, 1864, the regiment was present at the Drummondville Review, and in the same month, 1865, was represented at the Barrie Review by six Companies.

In the beginning of March, 1866, the whole Militia force was called out, in consequence of a threatened invasion by Fenians from the United States, and until the 24th May, the Queen's Own, among others, was drilling constantly, first twice a day, then nightly, and latterly twice a week. After the usual celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday, drill was ordered to cease, all seeming quiet; suddenly, however, on the 31st May, orders came in the evening for half the regiment to proceed next morning, to Port Colborne, as the Fenians were crossing from Buffalo. The afternoon of the 1st of June saw 350 officers and men at Port Colborne, under Major Gillmor where on the next morning, 125 more joined them, together with the 13th Battalion from Hamilton, and the York and Caledonia Rifle Companies. The whole force numbering about 850 men, under the charge of Lieut. Col. Booker, of the 13th Battalion, left Port Colborne, as ordered, at 5 a. m., to form a junction at 9 a. m., at Stevensville with a column consisting of Regulars and Militia, under Col. Peacocke of H. M. 16th Foot. Leaving the train at Ridgway Station, Col. Booker's force began its march at 7 a. m., for Stevensville, a distance of four miles and a half, the Queen's Own leading, with an advance guard. About a mile from Ridgway, the enemy was discovered, and the advance guard, (No. 5.) with two other companies extended on the front, (Nos. 1 and 2,) with two companies flanking, (Nos. 6 and 8,) three in support, (Nos. 3, 4 and 7,) and the remaining two in reserve with the 13th Battalion and York Company, the Caledonia Company forming the rear guard.

It is not necessary here to go into the details of the fight, to which the corps engaged can look back with little satisfaction, but it is only fair to give them the credit they deserve, for if they did not defeat the Fenians, they, at least gave such proof of the material of which they were made, as to cause the enemy to retrace their steps, rather than risk a second encounter with the Canadian Militia. While freely admitting the unfortunate result of the engagement at Limeridge, which has left a deep feeling of mortification in the minds of those who took part in it; a feeling in no manner ameliorated by the consideration that better troops have time and again behaved worse in similar situations, but intensified by the reflection that, but for the occurrences presently mentioned, a small force of Canadian Militia, for the first time under fire and wholly unaided by H. M. Regular Troops, after an obstinate resistance for two hours on the part of the enemy, would undoubtedly have inflicted a defeat which would have resulted in the destruction or capture of the invaders. No men ever went into action with more steadiness. The movements were made as regularly and coolly as if on an ordinary parade, and so was the firing. The advance of the skirmish line was almost uninterrupted, the enemy retiring everywhere before our men, and it was not until that unfortunate cry of "cavalry," which caused Col. Booker to have the *Retire* sounded for the Skirmishers, and the Reserve to form square, that the least disorder was apparent. The skirmish line at first paid no attention to the bugle, as they could not possibly see the reason for their being recalled, so well were they doing, but on repetition of the call they had unwillingly, to turn back, and this caused the square, which was just then retiring out of fire, to break, and for a few minutes disorder was supreme. Strenuous efforts were made to rally the men, and always with success, but so closely did the Fenians follow that there was no time to collect sufficient force to make a stand, so the broken columns returned to Port Colborne.

Proceeding, on the next day, from Port Colborne to Fort Erie, they joined the united forces of Cols. Lowry and Peacocke, and, after two or three days duty were sent to the garrison at Stratford, (consisting then of Capt. Gore's Battery of Royal Artillery, and two companies of H. M. 16th Foot,) under the command of the now celebrated Lieut. Gen. Sir

Garnet Wolseley, then a colonel on the staff. After remaining three weeks in Stratford, the regiment was relieved from duty until the following August, when it was sent to the Camp of Instruction at Thorold, for eight days, again to be under the command of Colonel Wolseley.

Owing to the exciting events of this year, the corps was kept constantly at work and fully up to its establishment, which at that time was 650, but as an instance of its popularity, it may be stated that, on the 17th March, there were upwards of 700 regularly enrolled members on parade, while at Stratford, the strength, with two companies attached was over 800.

Lieut.-Col. Gillmor, who assumed command in the latter part of 1865, served through 1866 and for many years afterwards, and to him must be given the credit of creating an *esprit de corps* which has carried the "Queen's Own" through many a trying and hard service.

One of the first corps to enrol under the Militia Act of 1868 was the Queen's Own, and this example was followed by many others, hitherto in doubt as to whether they would serve under that (then) obnoxious Act.

On the organization of the Red River Expedition, under Col. Wolseley, in 1870, two officers (Captain Bruce Harman, Ensign Hugh John Macdonald) with several men belonging to the regiment, were among those who took part in that service.

A period of rest and quiet prevailed until 1871, when brigade camps throughout the Dominion were inaugurated. At those of 1871 and 1872 in Niagara, the regiment carried off the palm, and as that of the latter year was probably the largest camp ever formed in the Dominion, some 6,200 being present, it was no small achievement. In 1875, at the same place like honours were reaped by the Queen's Own.

Shortly after returning from the last camp, the services of the corps were required in aid of the Civil Power at Toronto during the Pilgrimage riots, but fortunately assistance was not needed beyond that of the moral effect given by the presence of troops. Not so, however, at Belleville, on the 2nd January, 1877, when 160 of the regiment were hurriedly sent there to preserve the peace and protect the

property of the Grand Trunk Railway Company, from employees of that line on strike. The duty was an arduous one, for the intense cold soon penetrated through the glengarrys and serge trousers of the Engine guards and sentries, and on arriving at Belleville, volleys of abuse, followed by ice-balls, bricks and iron nuts greeted the corps. After two hours of such treatment without reply, during which many of the men were hit, the bayonet was resorted to and quiet ultimately restored. The detachment returned to Toronto on the morning of the 4th instant.

At the celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday at Montreal, in 1878, the Regiment took part, and was unanimously conceded to be numerically the strongest, and by far the most efficient corps on the ground. The whole journey, to and from Montreal, 670 miles, was accomplished in 44 hours, including five hours on parade during the review.

In addition to the services already alluded, to the regiment has furnished Guards of Honor to H. R. H. Prince Arthur, His Ex. Lord Monck, Governor General; His Ex. Lord Lisgar, Governor General; His Ex. Earl of Dufferin, Governor General; His Honor, Major General Stisted, C. B., Lieut. Governor; His Honor, W. P. Howland, C. B., Lieut. Governor; His Honor, Jno. Crawford, Lieut. Governor; His Honor, D. A. Macdonald, Lieut. Governor; and has been inspected by His Ex. Lord Monck, His Ex. Lord Lisgar, His Ex. Earl of Dufferin, Major General Napier, C. B., Major General Sir Jas. Lindsay, Major General Stisted, C. B., Lieut. Gen. Sir John Michel, K. C. B., Lieut. Gen. Sir Charles Windham, K. C. B., Lieut. Gen. Sir Selby Smythe, K. C. M. G., Sir Geo. E. Cartier, Minister of Militia, Col. Mountain, R. A., Col. P. L. MacDougall, Adj. Gen., Col. Robertson Ross, Adj. Gen., Col. Lowry, 47th Reg't, Col. McKinstry, 17th Reg't, Col. Radcliffe, R. A., Hon. W. Vail, Minister of Militia, Col. Geo. T. Denison, Commadant, Toronto. Lieut. Col. Durie, Dep. Adj. General.

The officers of the Queen's Own are taken from the ranks of the corps; and the services of many at present holding commissions extend over a long period, notably Surgeon Thorburn and Major Lee, Paymaster, twenty-two years, while Lieut. Col. Otter, Majors Arthurs, Jarvis, Miller and Chadwick, Captains Foster, Allan, Vandersmissen, Hamilton and Nash, vary from twelve to seventeen years each.

RECORD OF COMPANIES.

A. COMPANY.

A, the oldest and best service company, was Gazetted on 20th March, 1856, as the "1st Volunteer Rifle Company of Toronto," having been raised by Capt. Wm. March and Lieut. Geo. Brooke, and remained as an independent company until 20th April, 1860, when it was Gazetted as No. 2 Company, under Capt. Brooke, on the formation of the 2nd Battalion. On the reorganization of the Battalion in November, 1862, it became No. 1 Company, *vice* the Barrie Company. At one time it was known as "Brown's Gallopers," from its rapid marching, and among its principal officers have been Major Geo. Brooke, the first Senior Major of the Battalion, Capt. Douglas G. Macdonald, Capt. Joseph Davids, Capt. Malcolm Morison, Major Jno. Brown and Lieut. Col. Otter, who obtained his first commission under the last named officer, and was Lieutenant of the the Company for a few months previous to being appointed Adjutant. Major Lee, (Paymaster) joined this company as a private in 1856, and served four years with it as such. Of late years it has, under Capt. D. H. Allan, become the crack shooting company of the Battalion, having won the Company prize for five years in succession, the secret of its success being in the admirable system of "coaching" adopted as a team.

B. COMPANY.

Was Gazetted also on the 20th March, 1856, as the "3rd Volunteer Rifle Company of Toronto," having been raised by Capt. Nickinson, it joined the Battalion in April, 1860, as No. 3 Company, under Capt. Jas. Smith, and on the reorganization was posted as No. 2 Company. At Limeridge it was in the first skirmish line and lost three men killed, viz: Sergt. Hugh Matheson, Corp. Thos. Lakey and Private W. Smith. In the early part of 1872, the Company became disorganized, and was

not at theNiagara Camp of that year, towards the latter part of the year, however, it was reorganized by Lieut. Holwell, to be disorganized in May, 1877, and reorganized for the second time by Capt. Strange, assisted by the late Col. Sergt. Jas. Danford.

Major F. E. Dixon, of "Dixon's Manual," commanded the Company, also the late Capt. Farquhar Morison, and of those now serving in the Regiment, Major and brevet Lieut. Col. Jarvis, Major Chadwick. and Capt. and Adjt. Buchan have served as officers with it.

C. COMPANY.

Was, on 13th Nov., 1856, gazetted as the "Foot Artillery Company of Toronto," (to be attached to the Toronto Field Battery,) under Captain (now Brigade Major) Rob't B. Denison, and as such was known until the formation of the 2nd Battalion, when it was then under Capt. Hy. Goodwin, posted as No. 5 Company. On the reorganization in 1862, it was made No. 3 Company under Capt. Peter Patterson, who succeeded Capt. Goodwin on his being appointed Adjutant,

At Limeridge it was commanded by Captain Jas. B. Boustead, and while forming the front face of the Square, one of its best men, Pte. Mark Defries, was shot dead.

Captains Jas. Bennett, Thos. D. Delamere and James Pearson have at different times commanded this Company, it now being under Capt. Jos. M. Delamere.

D. COMPANY.

During the summer of 1861, a company was raised from among the merchants of Toronto and their clerks, which was gazetted on 30th August of that year, as "The Merchants Volunteer Rifle Company," under Capt. Jno. Boyd. Lieut. Wm. Murray and Ens. Wm. R. Harris,

The company attained such a strength that in the following year it was divided, and a second company formed known as the 2nd Merchants and now E. Company.

In November, 1862, the Company joined the Battalion, under Capt.

W. R, Harris, as No. 4 Company, and has ever since been one of the most prominent and efficient in the Regiment. On two occasions, it has, under Capt. and Brevet Major Albert A. Miller, made up an additional company from its ranks, to supply the places of companies for the time disorganized.

Major and brevet Lieut. Col. Arthurs, who was the first to sign its roll in 1861, served as a private and an officer of the Company for many years. Captains Robert Reford and John Douglas were also captains of the Company, the latter commanding it at Limeridge.

E. COMPANY,

Is a branch of D. Company, being formed from it and gazetted 14th March, 1862, under Capt. Wm. Murray, Lieut. John Kerr, and Ensign Arthur Coulson, being, at the same time, posted to the Battalion as No. 8 Company, and on the reorganization in November, 1862, it was made No. 5 Company. Under Captain Murray it became the most popular, efficient and best shooting company in the city, its authorized strength being 85 non-commissioned officers and men, but really 100. At one inspection the parade state shewed 96 actually present, while at battalion drills it was often divided into two companies.

Under Capt. Edwards, at Limeridge, being armed with Spencer Repeating Rifles, it formed the Advance Guard, and was the first company engaged. Ensign M. McEachren, one of its Subalterns was killed immediately the firing began.

Capt. Foster, its present commander, joined almost on the formation and has served through all grades in the company. The late Capt. Geo. T. Whitney and Capt. John Erskine have also commanded it.

One peculiarity of the company has been its "clannishness,", all ranks pulling well together, and endeavouring to keep up its reputation.

F. COMPANY.

The first company posted to the Battalion as No. 6 Company, was the Highland Rifle Company of Whitby, (now No. 1 Co., 34th Batt.)

in April, 1860; this company, however, never appeared on parade with the corps, although it was not gazetted out until Nov. 1862.

In September, 1861, a company called the Victoria Rifles was raised in the city, gazetted on the 6th Dec., 1861, under Capt. Lewis W. Ord, and in Nov., 1862, was posted to the Battalion as No. 6 Co., in place of the Whitby Company. Among those who first joined were Capt. G. Mercer Adam, Major Fred. E. Dixon of "Dixon's Manual," Major F. C. Draper, (now Chief of Police) and Lieut. Col. Otter, and though the company was at first so flourishing as to give strong hopes of forming a second company, it eventually became defunct in 1864, and it was not until Jan. 1866, that another was formed under Capt. G. M. Adam, dubbed, from the youthful appearance of its members, the "Babies," who, however, did good service at Limeridge where they were in the thickest in the fight. In June, 1869, the company again became disorganized, and remained so until April, 1872, when Capt. Norman Bethune formed another company, the men of which were transferred, in July, 1875, to G. Company, and the present company was then recruited from the Toronto Lacrosse Club, by Capt. R. B. Hamilton, in the latter part of 1875.

At the Regimental Drill competition in April, 1878, the prize, a silver cup, was awarded to this Company.

G. COMPANY.

A company was organized in 1861 by Capt. Latham, and posted on 21st Feb'y 1862 to the Battalion as No. 7 Company, but on the 21st Nov., 1862, it was transferred to the 10th Royals of Toronto as No. 8 Company, and for it the "Civil Service" Rifle Company of Toronto was substituted—this company had been gazetted on 14th March, 1862, Capt. Hon. Robt. Spence, Collector of Customs, Lieut. Jas. G. Hodgins, Dept. Supt. of Education, Ensign John Dewe, P. O. Inspector, being the officers, and was composed of civil service employees.

No. 7, was in the line of supports at Limeridge, and lost one man, killed, viz., Private Alderson.

Lieut. Col. Chas. T. Gillmor, late commanding the Regiment, was

a private in the company in 1862, and subsequently commanded it, as did also, Captains W. D. Jarvis, J. T. R. Stinson, and W. Cooper Campbell.

From 1874 to 1877 the company was weak and shaky and at two Inspections had to be made up from the surplus of another company.

Capt. Bowes and Lieut. W. E. Hodgins raised the present company in August, 1877, from among the law students of the city.

H. COMPANY.

As previously mentioned, the 2nd Merchant's Company, when gazetted, was first posted as No. 8 Company, and when on the reorganization of the 2nd Battalion, it became No. 5, the "Trinity College" Company, raised by Major Robt. B. Denison, in June, 1861, and posted as No. 9 Company, became No. 8, Capt. Thos. H. Ince succeeding Major Denison in command.

At Limeridge, No. 8 was the left flanking company under Capt. L. P. Sherwood, and at that time Major Salter M. Jarvis was a sergeant in the company. He afterwards commanded it, and was succeeded by Capt's. Bruce Harman and George A. McKenzie.

The students of Trinity College never being sufficiently numerous to form a strong company, were always obliged, to some extent, to recruit from those who were neither graduates or undergraduates of the college. In process of time the numbers of the outsiders increased while those of the Trinity men diminished, till shortly after Capt. Nash assumed command, in 1876, the latter ceasing to have a preponderating influence, withdrew altogether from the company.

This Company has always been a very steady one, and now takes the left of the Regiment on parade.

I. COMPANY.

The "University and College" Rifle Company, formed from students of the University of Toronto, was gazetted on the 8th May, 1862, under Captain Henry Croft, Lieut. J. B. Cherriman and Ensign Adam

Crooks, and was posted to the 2nd Battalion in November, 1862, as No. 9 Company, in place of the Trinity College Company which then became No. 8 Company.

In 1864 it was awarded the prize of $100 for being the best drilled company in this District, the Militia Department having offered a similar prize in each District.

At Limeridge, under Ensign Geo. T. Whitney, then of No. 8 Co'y, (deceased) it bore a distinguished part, for, though at first in the reserve, it was afterwards sent to the right of the skirmish line, and while there and during the retreat, lost three killed. Privates Tempest, Mewburn and McKenzie, and four wounded, Privates Vandersmissen, Kingsford, Patterson and Paul.

Captain Cherriman succeeded Captain Croft in 1867, and in March, 1872, a second company was formed by the students of the University and posted as No. 10 or K. Company, under Capt. W. H. Ellis, but it was found that two companies could not be efficiently maintained by University men proper, though it was not until 1877 that that conclusion was definitely arrived at, and the original idea of one company revived. Capt. W. H. Vandersmissen was then in command, and the men of both companies were put into one company and posted as K. Company, the present I Company composed of students from the Toronto School of Medicine, under Capt. Fred. H. Wright, taking the vacant place.

K. COMPANY.

The "Highland" Company was raised by Capt. Alex. M. Smith in September, 1856, and became No. 4 Company when the Battalion was formed, but being clothed in the kilt it was always placed on the left of the line on parade, and for the same reason it was posted as No. 10 Company on the reorganization.

Capt. Smith took a Majority in 1860, handing the company over to Capt. A. T. Fulton, who being a splendid drill, and aided by the natural steadiness of the Highlanders, soon obtained a reputation for his company, which they ever afterwards maintained.

In 1866, Capt. Jno. Gardner was in command, and at Limeridge led the company, which with No. 9 Co'y was in the reserve at first, and afterwards shared the honours of that company on the right of the skirmish line. Shortly after the engagement, Capt. R. H. Ramsay took command and continued so until the 1st October, 1868, when, because the Government refused to grant an allowance in lieu, of the ordinary uniform, with which to keep up the kilt, the company declined re-enrolling under the Militia Act of 1878, and therefore became defunct.

From 1868 until 1872 there was no No. 10 Company, but, as already stated in the services of I. Company, the students of the University of Toronto, furnished a second company, which in 1877 was finally posted to that number or letter. Capt. Baker in the following year succeeding to the command.

"Queen's Own Rifles."

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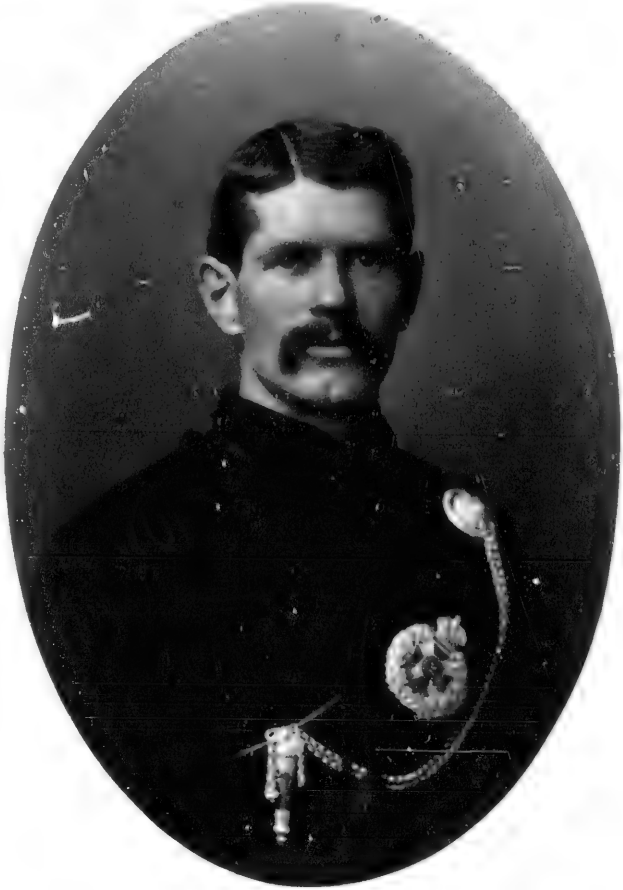
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